

BACKGROUND INTERVIEW WITH SENIOR U.S. DEFENSE OFFICIALS
BRUSSELS, BELGIUM
DECEMBER 14, 1994

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: I'm pleased to be here. Little bit of background: leading up to the Defense Planning Committee meeting that is taking place at the moment, we have seen a significant shift here at NATO--those of you who are based here--in attitudes in the last week or so deriving from the planning that is going on for the possible withdrawal of UNPROFOR forces from Bosnia and the decision and announcement by the United States last week about the role that it would play in a NATO-led operation. The change has been very strong support here at NATO among the troop-contributing nations to remain in Bosnia. And to continue doing the job to support the peace process, to support the humanitarian activities. It's been a fundamental turnaround in the atmosphere, in the attitudes and the substance in a very short period of days.

One of the concerns coming into this meeting, however, is the best means to make that possible for UNPROFOR to stay. And, the basic feeling has been that in order to be able to stay, there are two questions that come up. One is, is it doing its job. And secondly, how do we demonstrate collectively to the outside world that indeed this is so, and that UNPROFOR and the peace process should be given a chance to work its efforts. This comes obviously against the background of questions about whether there will be in the new year efforts in the United States Congress to lift the embargo, which as I am sure you know, is opposed by, I suspect, all the Allies here and certainly all the troop contributing nations.

So on the occasion of the Ministers being here, Secretary Perry, joined by Minister Rifkind of the United Kingdom, thought it would be useful as an informal non-NATO meeting--it is outside the Defense Planning Committee meeting--to get together with the troop-contributing nations in NATO, plus Italy--which is the country that provides a lot of the logistics, and as you know, the air fields that relate to NATO operations-- for an informal meeting which took place over breakfast this morning. And this followed the meeting in Washington between Secretary Perry and Minister Leotard of France that (the Second Senior U.S. Official) was present at and can talk to you further about it if you would like. And, the discussion centered this morning on how to help UNPROFOR be more effective at doing its job.

A number of ideas were suggested and discussed, but one practical result came out of it--again as an informal basis not a NATO meeting--to hold a meeting, beginning next Monday, at the invitation of the Dutch Minister of Defense, Mr. Voorhoeve in the Hague of all the troop contributing nations that were represented here plus France, since it did not happen to be in Brussels today, for reasons you all know. But

this is based upon ideas that came from this Minister. And the Chiefs of Defense will discuss among themselves, in an informal way, means in which UNPROFOR might be able better to do its job and other issues related to it. Obviously in its deliberations it would be drawing upon the advice and consultations of other interested parties, very important among which is the UNPROFOR commanders themselves, who have the direct experience, plus other interested countries including non-NATO troop contributors. The idea would be to work up a plan to see how UNPROFOR might be able to do its job better in order to reinforce the commitment of the troop-contributing nations to stay in Bosnia, if at all possible, with the object of coming up with ideas which could then be presented to the U.N. and to NATO for their consideration.

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Let me just add a footnote to what (First U.S. Senior Official) has said. I mentioned in a backgrounder that some of you attended last night, that the diplomacy that is occurring here is not within the formal NATO context. The breakfast this morning was not an official NATO meeting. It was an informal meeting. And the idea as I mentioned last night was to take advantage of the presence of such a large number of troop-contributing nations here in Brussels at this time to explore both the French proposals and any others which countries may come up with on how to make UNPROFOR more effective in carrying out its missions of providing humanitarian assistance and preventing the war from spreading. That essentially is the purpose of diplomacy. We have been in contact with the French, even though they are not present. We will be in contact with other countries as (First Senior U.S. Official) said. Basically this is the Bosnian issue, an issue which involves a wider set of countries, but we have used the opportunity of this venue to start the process which will then continue the next step next Monday in the Hague.

Q: Which Defense Ministers attended this morning, and how many countries within NATO provide troops, and how many troops?

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: There are nine troop-contributing nations, plus France. There were nine present this morning. If you want, the answer is nine minus Italy plus France.

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Plus the United States, even though we are not a troop-contributing nation.

Q: Does this mean that the United States won't be attending this meeting next Monday.

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: We will be. There has been an informal caucus here in this building for some time of the troop-contributing nations plus the United States, plus Italy. This has been an ongoing dialogue, but as (Second Senior U.S. Official) says, this is not a NATO affair at the moment. It just happened to be that these people were here in town on this particular occasion.

Q: You said nine plus Italy met this morning?

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Nine including Italy met this morning. And that includes the U.S. No, I'm sorry, there were ten countries present.

Q: Who were the other eight?

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: It's listed in your book there some where.

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States, of course.

Q: (inaudible)

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Chiefs of Defense of the countries that we have mentioned, and it is under the chairmanship of the Dutch.

Q: Will Secretary Perry be present?

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: No, it will be Chiefs of Defense. On the American side that will be the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, General Shalikashvili.

Q: (inaudible)

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Clearly at the appropriate time their advice and engagement will be deeply sought. We only worked this out now about two hours ago, so the modalities, exactly how it will work, are still being worked out. But, obviously, UNPROFOR--the people on the ground--their views are going to be instrumental.

Q: What has been decided in the meeting this morning?

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: There was not a decision on the substantive ideas of how to strengthen the UNPROFOR. The decision was on how to take the next steps in the process of evaluating the ideas that were discussed. And that essentially is what (First Senior U.S. Official) described to you: that the next step will be this meeting of Chiefs of Defense in the Hague.

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: The common view was the desire to keep UNPROFOR doing its job and to find a way to help it do its job, both to enable it to fulfill its humanitarian mission and to demonstrate to the governments that contribute troops that this is being done, and also to show the outside world, including attentive publics in the United States and on Capitol Hill, that this is indeed being done.

Q: Will the ideas put forward by the French be the basis of this meeting? Or will there be a formal agenda in which other proposals are being put forward? What will the the formulation

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: What was discussed this morning is that anyone can bring ideas to it. Clearly the ideas that came from Minister Leotard form a start. But the object is to decide and plan for the best way for UNPROFOR to do its job and many ideas we expect to come forward. The idea is to do this expeditiously. For this report to be done within ten days.

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: There were other ideas that were put on the table during breakfast. It will not just be the French ideas.

Q: Can you elaborate on those?

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: No.

Q: All the other ideals have been talked about in various forms, can you give us some general idea about which (inaudible)

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: I think at this stage it would be better to leave it for the internal discussions. But the point is, just to answer the question, it will not solely be the ideas that Minister Leotard presented.

Q: (inaudible)

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Well, as we have just said, this idea came to closure less than two hours ago. There will be discussions throughout the day here about the best means to carry this forward beyond the core we have just told you about. But obviously, this group is going to have to take into account the views of all interested parties and all engaged parties. The best way of doing that is going to be worked out.

Q: (inaudible)

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Again, it is a matter of working out the precise way of doing this so that it works best. But, obviously, the viewpoint of the people on the ground who have to fulfill the mission that the U.N. has entrusted to them, mainly the UNPROFOR commanders, are going to have to be actively engaged.

Q: (inaudible)

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: It is obviously premature to discuss any of that before our meeting takes place and the Chiefs of Defense discuss among themselves and with others precisely the best ways to strengthen UNPROFOR's role. That is the precedent requirement before figuring out who is going to do what. As far as American policy is concerned, I think it is clear, and has been made clear to all, in all of its dimensions on many occasions.

Q: These other proposals... (inaudible)... can you in a general indicate whether they cover the area of potential more of U.N.

troops on the ground or changes in U.N. command control structure...?

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: They do not include any changes in UNPROFOR's mission. They do suggest ways that within its existing mission it could be more effective in carrying it out.

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: The point was made this morning that one of the considerations for the Chiefs of Defense would be to look at what additional resources might be required to carry forward what it is that they decide.

Q: By resources, do you mean weapons, more troops?

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: That just is a generic term. To begin with you have to analyze what needs to be done, come up with your planning of what you would like to be done, and then see what resources of any kind might be required.

Q: Are we talking about is making these troops less vulnerable to harassment to attack and being kept from doing what they are supposed to do, and perhaps being more militarily responsive to attacks? I mean how else can they be more... (inaudible)...to be able to stand up in the face of harassment and be able to do what they are supposed to do?

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: I think you are going to have to take the words and try to interpret them along the lines of what you said.

Q: (inaudible)

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: This is not restricted just to air. It could also include changes on the ground.

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: The basic change that has taken place is what we have seen here in the last week, with the progress on planning for possible withdrawal of UNPROFOR and the commitment of the United States to play a role in that in a NATO-led operation. This has changed the attitude and the atmosphere within the Alliance and I think also in its relationship with the United Nations quite considerably. Against that background we have seen a rather extraordinary common support for a desire to keep UNPROFOR doing its job in the country. The talk in that meeting this morning, the talk we have heard at NATO in general in recent days, has not been, "how do we get out and when do we get out," but, "how do we find the means to stay"--against a background of reassurance provided by the withdrawal planning and the American commitment. So today's meeting takes place against a background of a desire to find ways to help UNPROFOR being more effective, without the kind of background of disagreements that we have seen so much in the past. What will come of that obviously will depend on what is worked out beginning of next week. But let me just reinforce what (Second Senior U.S. Official) has been saying. This is within the existing mandates given to UNPROFOR to fulfill its

humanitarian mission.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, does that mean there was no discussion of any evacuation plan whatsoever? That this was not even brought forward? We were under--we understood that there was formal planning taking place on an evacuation plan. Has that idea been totally rejected at this point?

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Not at all. The North Atlantic Council tasked the NATO military authorities to engage in planning. Elements of that were briefed to the chiefs of defense earlier this week. The planning is proceeding expeditiously and it will be carried promptly through to completion.

Q: Ambassador, you told us more resources will be needed for whatever scenarios are agreed at this (inaudible). Is there, to your mind, a willingness amongst the troop-contributing nations to increase resources in Bosnia, if that's all that's needed (inaudible).

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: No. What I said was, there was agreement this morning that, depending on what happens with the planning, resources that might be required would be looked at.

Q: Do you anticipate that NATO, as a formal body, is going to be mute on the subject officially about Bosnia, what to do next? And, secondly, is in this morning's restricted session, that the so-called detailed withdrawal scenario concepts are being briefed to ambassadors?

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Well, NATO is constantly seized with the Bosnia issue. We spend more than fifty percent of our time, I think, on that right now. So that the on-going consideration, not only withdrawal planning, but also other contingencies, will be continued. As the secretary mentioned, this morning's meeting was sort of outside of NATO. The defense ministers, rest assured, will be discussing the full range of Bosnia matters during their meetings.

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Let me make sure in answer to this and the previous question that there, indeed, has been discussion of contingency planning for UNPROFOR withdrawal, including a whole variety of dimensions to it. What we're pointing out, though, is that that is not the only discussion, because our first preference is that UNPROFOR not withdraw. But, yes, we have, both in our informal bilaterals with other countries, as well as in the formal sessions, there's discussion of the contingency planning for withdrawal.

Q: (inaudible) troop numbers (inaudible).

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: I don't think there's anything more to say than basic--the concept that's already appeared in public. We feel that it has to be under a unified NATO command, that it would be a considerable force, so that if the worst were to occur, it would be a force able to defend

itself. These concepts have already been pretty much explained in public, I think.

Q: But it was supposed to be agreed at this meeting for a more detailed conceptual plan, was supposed to be agreed at this meeting. Is that not going to happen?

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: I think the point is that it's not ready to be made public.

Q: But it is being briefed at this meeting?

Q: (inaudible)

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: I don't—I really don't think we can go too far into the details of this at this stage.

Q: (inaudible)

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Pardon?

Q: (inaudible)

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: I'm not sure I understood the question.

Q: (inaudible)

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Let me just say that the SACEUR was tasked to get provisional commitments from allies about what they would be willing to contribute. And without going into the details, the response has been certainly gratifying.

Q: Discussion covers all the six protected areas.

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Well, the discussion next Monday is going to be about how to help UNPROFOR do its job. And various ideas will be brought into play by various countries. It would be premature to try to forecast what those will be.

Q: Would it be fair to say that (inaudible) rather extraordinary change in attitude (inaudible) that this contingency plan--that some of the urgency has been taken away from (inaudible).

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Absolutely not. It may be that there--well, let me just say that NATO is proceeding with the same degree of urgency that it was before to bring to fruition the planning for possible withdrawal from--of UNPROFOR from Bosnia. What has changed is that in light of this planning and in light of the American commitment, that there's been a dramatic turn-around in attitudes, and the emphasis now is on keeping UNPROFOR in country, and helping it do a more effective job. Every single person who spoke this morning spoke to that effect.

Q: Has there been any (inaudible) from the U.N. forces on the ground about the (inaudible) idea of (inaudible)?

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Well, we haven't had time in two hours and five minutes.

Q: (inaudible) Contact Group. I mean, the corridor idea, for example.

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: There have been a number of discussions and obviously, as I mentioned in my backgrounder last night, that one can always find flaws with any idea. So, sure, people have raised questions here and there, but I'd--as I also said in the backgrounder last night, I have not heard anything that has ruled things off the table.

Q: (inaudible) Ambassador, you said (inaudible).

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Just in general terms. We have a number of countries here who are in NATO but also are troop-contributing nations. And the general discussion around this building is that the kind of dilemmas that these countries are finding for themselves are vastly reduced, and the whole tenor of discussion around NATO is that the polarization that there was for a good deal of time, between NATO responsibilities and UNPROFOR responsibilities, had been dramatically reduced, and in many cases, had simply disappeared.

Q: Could you tell us a bit about the process? What will happen after Monday if there are certain ideas taken up by the chiefs of the military? What do they do then? Will there--is there a possibility that any of the decisions that they take at that meeting would have to go before the Security Council? Do you have any sense of what could occur?

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Well the basic framework is to help UNPROFOR do its job better. There are U.N. resolutions. There is a mandate that's gone to UNPROFOR. As to what decisions will be required by whom, based on that planning, will depend on the plan.

Q: (inaudible)

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: The--I think one could open questions about how UNPROFOR carries out its existing mandate. If that leads to questions about rules of engagement, that would be something to be discussed.

Q: In simple terms, could you explain to us possibly (inaudible) some concept of what needs to be improved on the ground in Bosnia for the United Nations that stay there permanently? What would--obviously, (inaudible), but in general terms, what do you want to see happening in the future that isn't happening now?

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Well, the mission that UNPROFOR fulfills now is to provide humanitarian assistance, and to prevent the spread of the conflict. And if you look at what's happened in recent weeks, it's been very difficult for UNPROFOR to carry out that mission. We would like to find ways to make UNPROFOR able to overcome the types of things

that have prevented them from carrying out that mission. The details of that, as I say, would be inappropriate to discuss now since they're going to be discussed at this meeting. But I'd like to go back to an earlier point that [the first official] made about the relationship between the positive effects of the President's statement about guaranteeing, essentially, American assistance and NATO assistance in UNPROFOR's ultimate withdrawal. And the fact that we're spending time at this meeting of how to improve UNPROFOR's performance. It's a little bit like a tightrope walker who has or does not have a safety net. A tightrope walker without a safety net is going to be a little less daring than a tightrope walker that has one. What the American President's decision does, is provide that safety net, and we're now trying to get a little bit more--let's say a little bit more robust performance on this--on the tightrope.

Q: Is there a likelihood that there will be an increase, large or small, in the number of UNPROFOR troops? Or is this mainly a physical realignment of the troops so that you will have more (inaudible) more able to defend themselves.

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: There's no way of telling now what the plan will be, but emphasize the thrust. Up until last Thursday, the anxiety was, how can we get UNPROFOR out if we have to? The concern today is, since collectively the two contributing nations of NATO want to stay, how do we make that effort more effective as it stays? This has been the dramatic turnaround. A meeting that could have been dominated by, "How do we get troops out?" The atmosphere is being dominated by, "How do we help them stay?"

Q: (inaudible) the incident of the Bangladeshi (inaudible) because the helicopter was not allowed to leave. (inaudible) react to that?

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: I think we should let our words speak for themselves, and then wait to see what precisely comes out of the meetings that the chiefs of defense will convene.

Q: Is there any chance that UNPROFOR will drop the dual-key arrangement? In other words, if French troops are in trouble, or British troops are in trouble, that they can then call on NATO war planes themselves, without having to go through UNPROFOR?

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Remember UNPROFOR is a U.N. operation. The idea of trying to drop the dual-key would be, I think, extremely difficult. After all, the U.N. is ultimately responsible for UNPROFOR under U.N. resolutions--Security Council resolutions.

Q: But that's been part of the problem, and part of the frustration.

SECOND SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: But I--the answer to your question is, I would doubt it.

2562

THIRD SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: We have time for one or two more questions.

Q: If next Monday the military chiefs reach the conclusion that there is a need for an increasing of the number of UNPROFOR soldiers in Bosnia, is there any possibility for U.S. to send ground forces in such an operation?

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: Well, two things. First, I don't think we should anticipate what the chiefs of defense may recommend. And secondly, the position of the United States with regard to forces has been made clear on many occasions. Most recently, on the other direction, from some other things that have been said, was last week, in terms of the pledges with regard to withdrawal.

Q: What will happen in the UNPROFOR still humiliated as by the Serbian militia, as they did now? What will happen in the next weeks if the situation still like this?

FIRST SENIOR U.S. OFFICIAL: The question of UNPROFOR effectiveness, which goes directly to that, is one of the things that is prompting the meeting next week, to see what can be done in general to improve effectiveness, to use a blanket word.

Thank you.

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